



New Jersey Department of Children and Families Policy Manual

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Purpose:

This issuance establishes the policy and procedures for the Department of Children and Families on the proper use of car safety seats. This policy was developed in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety and the DCF Office of Training & Professional Development to implement the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) best practices recommendations for child restraints.

Authority:

- Executive Authority Pursuant to N.J.S.A 9:3A-1 et seq.
- N.J.S.A. 39:3-76.2f.

Policy:

A) Training

All staff responsible for transporting children and families or inspecting child restraints for resource parents must be trained by a National Certified Child Passenger Safety Instructor in proper restraint use for occupant protection. The Worker must refer any specific questions regarding the correct use of the child restraint system (e.g., proper installation to accommodate a specific child, etc.) to the Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST).

B) Check the Child Safety Seat

Workers must check the manufacturer's information on the child safety seat, to assure the device is not expired. (Note: Refer to the child restraint user's manual

or vehicle user manual regarding proper installation and use of the child safety seat, usually located in the glove compartment of the State vehicle).

C) State Requirements

New Jersey State law requires that drivers of motor vehicles, and every passenger in every seating position, are correctly restrained at all times. DCF employees and all passengers being transported in State vehicles must be properly restrained whenever a vehicle is in motion or is on a roadway. The following information guides all State of NJ employees who transport children:

- Drivers must be properly secured with State vehicle lap and shoulder belts, according to vehicle manufacturer instructions;
- Children under the age of 2 and weighing less than 30 pounds must be secured in a rear-facing child passenger restraint system which is equipped with a five-point harness; unless they exceed the maximum rear-facing weight or height limitations allowed by the specific convertible child restraint manufacturer;
- Children age 2 or older, and those younger than age 2, who have outgrown the rear-facing weight or height limit of a convertible child restraint, must ride in a forward-facing child restraint with a five point harness up to the highest weight or height allowed by the specific convertible child restraint manufacturer;
- Children under the age of 8 years and less than 57 inches in height must be secured in a forward-facing child passenger restraint system which is equipped with a five-point harness until the child outgrows the top height or weight recommendation made by the manufacturer of the child passenger restraint system, at which point the child must be secured in a rear-seat in a booster seat;
- Children whose vehicle lap and shoulder belts fit correctly and who are over 8 years of age or 57 inches in height must be properly secured with vehicle lap and shoulder belts, according to vehicle manufacturer instructions;
- Drivers of a State vehicle must secure, and confirm to be secured, all passengers of a State-owned vehicle, operated on a street or highway in this State, and must wear a properly adjusted and fastened safety seat belt system as defined by Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 209; and
- Children transported in a State vehicle must ride in an appropriate rear-seating position until they are at least 13 years of age.

Note: State law requires that adult passengers being transported in State vehicles must be properly secured in accordance to State law N.J.S.A. 39:3-76.2f. Also, DCF staff must ensure that if the child safety seat has a base, that base will be utilized in the transportation of children. See the attached link for

more information from the Office of the Attorney General regarding car passenger safety. <http://nj.gov/lps/hts/childseats/index.html>.

D) Authorized Child Restraints

DCF employees responsible for transporting children under the State's care, custody, or supervision, must transport using only DCF issued child restraint equipment.

DCF employees are not authorized to transport any CP&P adult clients or children using their private vehicles or non-issued DCF child restraint equipment. DCF employees must not transport any CP&P clients or their children using a vehicle that is not State-owned. The State vehicle must include DCF child restraint equipment. All child restraints need to be buckled in when not being used so they do not become projectiles.

E) Visual Inspection of Child Restraints / Vehicle Seat Belt System

Employees, prior to transporting a child in a State-owned vehicle, are required to visually inspect each child restraint to ensure that it is in working order. Workers must observe, and immediately inform, the Car Care Liaison of any defects or visible signs or damage (cracks, discoloration of the plastic, deformed parts, etc.)

The Worker must not transport any child in a State vehicle with any observed defects in the child restraint system. If after trying to secure the child in the rear-seat with the seat belt, and the belt is non-functional, the Worker must not use the vehicle to transport the child. The Worker must inform the Car Care Liaison of any defects / problems with the seat belt.

Note: Child restraint instruction Manual must be accompanied with the child restraint.

F) Possessing the Wrong Seat

If you do not have the proper child seat/restraint system, with the appropriate weight and height range for the child you are transporting, do not transport the child(ren) in that child restraint.

G) Child Restraint Registration Cards

The Car Care Liaison must maintain a log which tracks all child restraints:

- Infant only seat,
- Convertible seat (rear-facing/forward-facing), and
- Belt-positioning booster seat (BPB).

Child restraints may be subject to a manufacturer's recall. If this occurs, the seats must be returned to be repaired or replaced. The safety seats must comply with minimal safety standards. Each Local Office will have a Car Care Liaison responsible for ensuring registration cards are returned to the Office of Facilities Management.

H) Child Restraint Expiration

Child restraints that are beyond the expiration dates designated by the manufacturer must not be utilized to transport any child. If an employee discovers an expired child restraint, the employee immediately informs the designated Car Care Liaison to request a replacement. (All seats have expiration dates, if not on the label it is on the shell of the seat.)

The Office of Facilities Management must be contacted to properly remove expired car seats/child restraints. Expiration dates vary by manufacturer. The Juvenile Products Manufacturer Association (JPMA) suggests replacing seats after 6 years.

The Worker must inform the Resource Parent to contact the Local Office to report an expired child restraint. The assigned Worker explores use of Local Office Bank Account (LOBA) funds to replace the expired car restraint.

Note: See [Disposal of Car Seats](#)

I) Securing a Child Restraint System or Booster Seat For Resource Parents

Whenever placing or moving a child in resource family care, who is under 8 years of age and less than 57 inches in height, the Worker must determine whether the resource parent or the LO has a child passenger restraint system or booster seat available for the child.

If the Resource parent does not have the appropriate seat then the Worker must issue a check from the Local Office Bank Account (LOBA) to the resource parent to purchase a child passenger restraint system or booster seat. If a child moves from one placement to another, and still needs the child passenger restraint system or booster seat previously purchased, the Worker must transfer the child passenger restraint system or booster seat with the child.

If the child outgrows the child passenger restraint system or booster seat assigned to him/her, the Worker must return the child passenger restraint system or booster seat to the Local Office for reassignment.

If a child returns home to his/her parents, the Worker must return the car seat to the Local Office so that it may be issued to another resource parent, when needed.

J) Motor Vehicle Accidents Involving Child Restraint Equipment

The Car Care Liaison must immediately remove from service and inspect any child restraints which are involved in a motor vehicle accident. The Car Care

Liaison must check the child restraint user manual for instructions on what to do with a child restraint that is involved in an accident.

Note: The Car Care Liaison ensures that the manufacturer's replacement guidelines are followed.

K) Proper Use of Rear-Facing Restraint

When installing a rear-facing child restraint using the rear-facing belt path in the back seat, the Worker must:

- Ensure his or her head is at least 1 inch from the top of the child restraint shell.
- Ensure the harness is at or below the child's shoulders.
- Ensure the harnesses are snug and flat against the child.
- Ensure that he or she cannot pinch any slack in the harnesses above the retainer clip/chest clip.

L) Range of Angles of the Car Seat

If a range of angles is allowed, a younger infant must be at the more reclined end of that range so their head does not fall away from the shell. The Worker must use a noodle, a foam stick placed under the child restraint in the rear, to ensure the child restraint is at the proper angle. The built-in angle adjustment features on many models will help to do that.

- If a vehicle seat is deeply sloped or a child restraint does not have an angle adjustment feature, the Worker may need to place a foam noodle on the vehicle seat where the vehicle seat cushion meets the vehicle seat back.
- Do not use hard or heavy objects for this purpose. They will likely dislodge in a crash and may become projectiles.
- If the child restraint normally remains in the vehicle, the Worker regularly checks to ensure the angle is still correct, that any noodles are still in place, and that the vehicle belt is tight.

SPECIAL NOTE: Using too many noodles, so the child restraint tilts too far back can be dangerous, and can create a higher likelihood of head or neck injury. Do not use more than 3 noodles at a time.

M) Checking the Tightness of the Child Restraint System

Workers check the tightness of the child restraint system before the Worker moves the child in a State vehicle. The Worker checks along the correct belt path of the restraint system to ensure the system/seat does not move sideways or towards the front more than one inch. If it does, tighten the seat belt or LATCH to ensure that the child does not move while the State vehicle is in motion.

Rear-Facing Carriers must only be used for travel. When removing carriers from State vehicles ensure the child is fully buckled in and handle is locked into place. The child should be removed from an infant carrier once you have reached your destination.

See [New Requirements for Rear-Facing Child Only Child Restraint](#).

N) Transporting Special Needs Children

Prior to transporting a child with health issues, or special needs, the resource parent or Worker must consult, or have consulted previously as part of the child's health plan, with a nurse or the child's managing health provider to determine if a second adult is necessary to accompany the child during transportation, and what the qualifications of the second adult should be, such as the capacity to contact 911 in case of a medical emergency or CPR certification.

Procedures:

A) Proper Use of Forward-Facing Restraint

When installing a forward-facing child restraint using the forward-facing belt path in the back seat, The Worker ensures the child is forward-facing and the top of the child's ears must not come above the top of the child restraint shell. Ensure the harnesses are at or above their shoulders. Ensure the harnesses are snug and flat against the child. The Worker must not be able to pinch any slack in the harnesses above the retainer clip/chest clip.

Note: Forward-facing only: The top tether must be attached to the correct anchor in the vehicle and must be snug. Check the vehicle manual to identify the location of top tether anchors.

B) Proper Use of Belt Positioning Booster Seat (BPB)

The Worker ensures that all BPB's be installed in the back seat using both lap and shoulder belt. Both lap and shoulder belts are placed underneath the BPB's arm rests.

The Worker must ensure the top of the child's ear should not come above the top of the booster or vehicle seat. Ensure the lap belt is snug across the child's upper thighs. Ensure the shoulder belt is snug across the child's chest & shoulder.

C) Proper Use of Seat Belt

The Worker ensures the child sits with his or her back and hips against the vehicle seat. The Worker also ensures:

- The full back and buttocks of the child makes contact with the seat cushion.
- The seat belt is fastened.
- Ensures the child's knees bend naturally and comfortably over the seat edge.
- Whether the lap belt is low and snug on the thighs and lower hips.

Note: These are the areas on the body that are the strongest for a potential impact which cause the least amount of damage.

- The shoulder belt is snug across the chest The child is able to maintain this position for the entire ride.

Key Terms (Definitions):

Child Restraints or Child Restraint System (CRS) - A crash tested device or system that is specifically designed to provide infant/child crash protection. General terms for systems include child safety seats, boosters, and vest or car beds that meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard FMVSS213 .

LATCH - Lower Anchors and Tethers for CHildren.

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 208 (FMVSS208) - This standard regulates seat belts and frontal air bags.

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 213 (FMVSS213) - This rule provides child restraint standards for children up to 80 pounds. LATCH-on child restraints (CR) have two parts: top tether reduces forward movement; lower anchor replaces seat belts for installation.

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard Number 209 (FMVSS209) - FMVSS No. 209, *Seat Belt Assemblies*, applies to seat belt assemblies for use in passenger cars, multipurpose passenger vehicles, trucks, and buses. Seat belt assemblies are devices such as straps, webbing, or similar device designed to secure a person in a motor vehicle in order to mitigate the results of any accident, including all necessary buckles and other fasteners and all system hardware including hardware designed for installing such seat belt assembly in a motor vehicle.

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 225 (FMVSS225) - This standard provides location and strength of child restraint anchorage system for light duty passenger vehicles manufactured after September 2002. LATCH has two parts: the top tether anchor points are used only for forward-facing; lower anchors in or near the seat belt, which is at the base or crack of the seat, can be used rear-facing or forward-facing. Do not use the LATCH system at the same time as the seat belt.

Infant-Only Seat - A child restraint system designed for use only in a semi-reclined rear-facing position. All children must ride in a rear-facing child restraint system until they are age 2 or once they have exceeded the manufacturer's recommended weight or height limits.

Rear-Facing - A child restraint system intended for use only in the semi-reclined rear-facing position. The rear-facing position supports the entire head, neck, and back. The system cradles and moves with the child to reduce stress to the neck and spinal cord in a crash. The Worker needs to ensure that the rear-facing belt path is being used. Always check the child's restraint labels and the manufacturer's instructions to identify the correct belt path.

Forward-Facing - A child restraint system intended for use in the forward-facing position. This system is designed for a child at least age 2 who has outgrown the rear facing limits (height or weight) of the car seat. Weight and height limitations vary by the manufacturer. The Worker needs to ensure that the forward-facing belt path is being used. Always check the child's restraint labels and the manufacturer's instructions to identify the correct belt path.

Convertible Seat - A child restraint that converts from rear-facing for infants and smaller children to forward-facing for older and larger children. This category includes three-in-one car seats which also have a booster mode. Convertible seats have weight ranges for both rear-facing and forward-facing units that vary based on the manufacturer. The car seat must recline to a 45 degree angle for the rear-facing position.

Belt-Positioning Booster Seat (BPB) - A crash tested device that raises the child and guides the belt positioning so that the required lap and shoulder belts fit correctly. It must be used with vehicle lap and shoulder belts.

Seat belt - The webbing, anchors, and buckle system that restrains the occupant in the vehicle.

Harness - A system of straps that keep the child within the seat shell, that distributes crash forces and helps the child ride down the crash. Some harnesses require re-threading for height adjustment and others do not.

Detachable Base - Refers to a separate base for an infant-only child restraint system that can be installed in the vehicle. The restraint (car seat) portion can be removed from the base, and used as an infant carrier.

Recall - Refers to a voluntary or required action taken to correct problems or deficiencies once products have been distributed or sold. Manufacturers must offer free repairs or replacements for products recalled for violations of safety standards.

Registration Card - Refers to a postage-paid return card that comes with every child restraint. This card must be returned to the manufacturer so that owners can be notified of any recall.

Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST) - A person who successfully completes the National Highway Traffic Safety Administrations (NHTSA) standardized child passenger safety certification program.

High Back Belt Positioning Booster (BPB) - High Back BPB's must be used in the forward-facing position only. They must also be used with the vehicle lap and shoulder seat belt system. High back BPB's must support the back and head of the child (weight and height limitations vary by manufacturer). The seat must have an open-looped shoulder belt guide and padded armrests to help ensure proper seat belt positioning of the shoulder and lap portions of the belt.

Appropriate Placement of Seat Belts - A seat belt fits an occupant correctly when he or she sits with his or her back and hips against the vehicle seat back with knees bent naturally over the front edge of the seat. The lap portion of the seat belt stays low and snug across the upper thighs. The shoulder portion of the seat belt fits snugly across the mid-chest and shoulder. The occupant remains in this position for the entire time while the vehicle is in motion.

Car Care Liaison- The individual in the Area Office responsible for the overall maintenance of the Child Restraint System in State vehicles in use in Local Offices which comprise the Area.

Forms and Attachments:

- <http://www.nj.gov/oag/hts/downloads/hts-car-childseat-safety-eng.pdf>

Related Information:

N/A